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### The Effect of Failure on Self-Concept

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THE EFFECT OF FAILURE ON SELF-CONCEPT

prepared in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for Honors in Sociology/Anthropology

by

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effects of failure on an individual's self-concept. A model based on symbolic interaction and attribution theories, among others, is elaborated to predict how an individual's self-concept will be affected by failure situations. It is argued that where the individual chooses to attribute causality for failure in the situation will determine the effects of that failure on his self-concept, unless the individual's belief system modifies the attribution process. This attribution is related to one major individual difference: a person's generalized expectancy for control. It is hypothesized that an individual's predisposition to conceive of causality as deriving from either environmental, external forces or personal, internal forces, will mediate the attribution process and hence the effect of the failure on his self-esteem. The hypothesized effects of failure on self-concept are tested by analysis of 122 undergraduate students' responses to a series of ten hypothetical failure situations. Respondents were asked to indicate, for each situation, whether they would attribute their failure to environmental forces or the personal forces of ability or motivation and the degree to which their self-esteem would be reduced by their attribution. Responses to Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Scale and Gough and Heilbrun's (1965) Adjective Checklist were obtained to measure the respondents' internality-externality and self-confidence, respectively. Responses to the hypothetical situations were compared across individuals who varied along these two personality dimensions. Analysis indicated that the respondents' reactions to failure situations seemed to depend on the combined

effects of the internal-external and self-confidence dimensions of their personality, that is, whether they were internal or external and had high or low self-confidence. These reactions seemed to mediate the attribution process resulting from failure and the effects of these attributions on self-evaluation.



/The individual lives at the intersection of many social circles./ He is determined sociologically in the sense that the groups "intersect" in his person by virtue of his affiliation with them.../T/he objective structure of a society provides a framework within which an individual's non-interchangeable and singular characteristics may develop and find expression, depending on the greater or lesser possibilities which that structure allows.

G. Simmel (1955, 150)

The growth of the self arises out of a partial disintegration - the appearance of the different interests in the forum of reflection, the reconstruction of the social world, and the consequent appearance of the new self that answers to the new object.

G. H. Mead (1913, 379-380)

## INTRODUCTION

What happens to a person's view of himself when he fails? Each of us has been involved in situations where our desired objective or goal in the situation was not achieved, and what happened? Sometimes we felt guilty, frustrated, indifferent, or hostile, etc.; sometimes we developed a new view or opinion of ourselves. Different failure situations seemed to affect our self-concepts differently. We may also have noticed that different people experience the same failure situation differently: some may blame extenuating circumstances or other people for the failure and others may assume personal responsibility. Thus there seem to be differences among individuals in their responses to failure situations, as well as among responses to different types of failure. This paper will elaborate these situational and individual differences and combine them in a theoretical model that is useful for a systematic exploration of the effects of failure situations on self-concept. Hypotheses derived from this model will be tested by analyzing the responses to a questionnaire containing hypothetical failure situations and measures of individual differences. Of central importance to this model is an understanding of the characteristics of a self-concept. Our attention is first directed to a discussion of the formation and continual development of one's self-concept.

## I. HUMAN INTERACTION AND THE SELF

G. H. Mead's (1934) conception of society places the development of the self in the context of what is necessary for human interaction. To Mead, all group life is essentially a matter of the cooperative behavior resulting from human interaction. Human interaction, it is argued, depends on a process wherein each individual ascertains the intentions of the acts of others by referring to the symbolic content of the other's gestures and makes his response on the basis of that intention. In order for interaction to occur, then, human beings must share expectations and the meanings of symbolic gestures; the observer must be able to infer the intentions of the other correctly. This consensus enables different individuals to respond in the same way to the same gesture and implies that a person is able to respond to his own gestures in the same way that he would respond to another's. To state that the human being can respond to his own gestures necessarily implies that he possesses a self, an object to which responses and evaluations can be directed (Mead: 1934, 139). An individual may act socially towards himself just as toward others and thus the human being may become the object of his own actions. Each individual comes to understand and evaluate his own intentions and the intentions of others through the process of role-taking (Cf. Kelley, Osborne, and Hendrick: 1974).

In Mead's formulation, adopting the standpoint of the other serves two related functions:

1. Role-taking permits the self to become an object to itself; and,
2. Allows the individual to understand the perspective of the other more fully.

The process through which an individual comes to understand the intentions of others, therefore, is also the process through which an individual comes to understand himself.

## II. DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT

A person's view of himself is not inborn, but is formed, within certain biological limits, by the interaction between the person and his physical, cultural, and social environment. The self is created in the same way as other social objects, through the definitions made by others in the social environment (Mead: 1934, 140). Mead (1934) posits a series of developmental stages for the evolution of the self. At each stage, the person engages in progressively more refined role-taking behavior to understand the definitions of the self made by others until a fully developed self results.

The first stage in the development of self has been called the preparatory stage (Meltzer: 1972, 9). As an infant, the person engages in meaningless imitation of the parents and is primarily, in Mead's terms, an "I" (Meltzer: 1972, 10). The "I" is the subject of actions, never the object, and is the source of the person's impulsive tendencies and creative force (Mead: 1913, 374). The object of a person's actions, the "me", develops in the play stage (Meltzer: 1972, 10). At this time, the child engages in non-reflexive role-taking (Turner: 1956, 321); the child imaginatively puts himself into the position of a significant other to determine the expectations, values, and attitudes of the other and incorporates these beliefs into himself (Mead: 1934, 150). No evaluation of the self is implied by this type of role-taking; role-taking in this sense serves only to direct and guide behavior. In this way, the significant others of the social environment transmit the culture of the larger society to the child and the child identifies with the values. The "me" is thus the incorporated other within the individual. Role-taking, by definition, creates a view of the self as

object, and, because the child has no unitary standpoint from which to view himself, several separate and discrete selves develop at this stage from the many other-roles the individual adopts in particular situations (p. 159).

In the next stage, the game stage (p. 152), the individual develops a constant reference point from which one self may be formed, and the ability to evaluate his actions. By combining the common elements of each of the roles he has interacted with in the play stage, the child develops and internalizes a corporate role with which to imaginatively interact; he develops a generalized other from which to view himself and his behavior (p. 154). Role-taking, with respect to the generalized other, leads the individual to develop a single role for himself. The child's behavior achieves consistency because it is expressed in terms of generalized expectations of each of the others of the play stage (p. 159). The child can now derive from this consistency an understanding of his internal dispositions; what he is and does, what he is not and does not. The individual also internalizes the value this other places on particular dispositions; the individual develops a sense of self-esteem and worth from evaluating his identified disposition. This type of role-taking behavior is Turner's (1956, 321) reflexive role-taking, or Cooley's (1909) "looking-glass" self. The reflexive self can now criticize, approve, suggest, and consciously plan the individual's behavior to conform with his expectations.

Through these developmental stages the child learns what is expected of him and adopts these expectations as his own. Reflexive selfhood allows the individual to place and organize his experiences within the symbolic system provided by others in the social situation and evaluate himself by adopting the values implied in this symbolic system with respect to himself.

The development of the reflexive self is the culminating step in a process involving increasingly complex role-taking behavior. R. Coser (1975) argues that the ability to form a reflexive self is differentially distributed in the population because of the different types of role-taking demands the social structure places on the individual. On one end of a continuum are simple role-sets in which all of the individuals with whom one interacts are similar to each other and have consistent and similar expectations for one's behavior (p. 243). At the other end of the continuum lie complex role-sets. Role partners in these sets include individuals who occupy different positions from one another and who tend to have contradictory demands and expectations (p. 243). Because the reflexive self is a conscious composite and integration of the role expectations with which a person has interacted, the reflexive self developed from complex role-sets is inherently more defined and complex because of the choices the individual must make than that developed from simple role-sets. The individual in a complex role-set must take the role of many distinct others and must articulate or make his own role from incompatible expectations. The resulting self in complex role-sets is therefore the individual's unique response to his social position, an expression of the individual's internal dispositions. Identity formation in simple role-sets does not involve as much effort.

One does not have to make as much effort to put oneself in the position of the other person if behavior is based more nearly on absolute rules as when norms are more fluid and are being interpreted in interaction with people whom, in addition, one knows only partially...less reflection is needed to communicate with one's role partners because one knows what they have on their mind, and one also knows that they know what one has on one's own mind. Such knowledge cannot be taken for granted in a complex role set, where intentions and attitudes have to be mutually gauged for mutual understanding...To operate in a complex role-set, one must gain perspective on the various attitudes of the diverse role partners by putting oneself in the position of each of them as they relate to one another. One must keep in mind that they are different from oneself and from one another and that this difference imposes certain adjustments in one's own stance. (Coser: 1975, 254, 257)

People in different social positions are therefore not equally able to articulate their roles. Coser argues that it is people of relatively higher status who are forced to interact with diverse others and who must therefore take many factors into account when formulating, describing and evaluating their behavior (p. 244). It is these higher status individuals who consciously make their role, their social identity (Hughes: 1958, 43), their reflexive self.

### III. SELF-CONCEPT REFINED

Up to this point, we have discussed the development of a self-concept from an "I" to a reflexive self containing expectations, motivations to achieve those expectations, ways of evaluating one's progress toward reaching those expectations, and a view and evaluation of self. These aspects of the reflexive self will now be explored in depth.

Once a self-concept has been formulated, the dynamic process continues; the individual asks himself three questions:

1. How should I view the world (Shibutani: 1955)?
2. How much X do I have (Pettigrew: 1967)?
3. What sort of person am I for possessing that much X (Pettigrew: 1967)?

Each of these questions is answered for the individual by engaging in some type of role-taking behavior; the self develops and continues to be refined by the process of role-taking. The other with whom an individual compares and evaluates himself has been designated in theory as the referent individual or reference group (Pettigrew: 1967, 243).

1. How should I view the world?

The comparison with and internalization of the norms and expectations of the reference group allows the individual to internalize the culture of



his society and referent others; to formulate a frame of reference or belief system from which to organize his perceptions of reality, his conduct, his values and his expectations (Shibutani: 1955, 165). This self question also relates to the person's feeling of efficacy. The individual learns that he can create his life by actively interacting with the physical and social environment, and that he has expectations that guide, direct, and motivate this behavior.

## 2. How much X do I have?

This question of the self also refers to the comparative functions of reference groups (Kelley: 1952, 413), and is the subject of Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison processes. Festinger hypothesizes that there exists in the human being a drive to identify and evaluate his opinions and his abilities (p. 117); to form a self-description. The theory goes on to hypothesize that an individual will seek to identify his salient opinions and abilities by comparing himself with those referents he perceives similar to himself, if no objective non-social measure of the opinion or ability exist in the environment (pp. 118-120). Some of these comparisons require taking the role of the other, such as determining the adequacy of a particular goal or level of aspiration, but others, such as evaluating one's social status or situation do not (Turner: 1956, 327; Pettigrew: 1967, 254). If the individual compares unfavorably to the comparison level set by the referent, the individual is motivated to change that opinion or ability to bring it into conformity with the group standard, providing that the opinion or ability is important to the individual (Festinger: 1954, 130). Anything that increases the saliency of the opinion or ability to the individual or to the referent group, or increases the importance of the group as a general reference, will increase the pressures towards uniformity on the opinion or ability (p. 130).



The effects of these pressures to uniformity vary with opinions and abilities (Festinger, Torrey, and Willerman: 1954). Opinions are relatively mutable characteristics and may therefore be easily changed to conform to the group. Once a person has decided that the group opinion is correct, there are few internal or external constraints preventing the change. Abilities, on the other hand, are dispositional properties (Hastorf, Schneider, and Polefka: 1970, 1976), stable characteristics of the individual, and are not easily changed (Festinger: 1954, 125). Group pressure can only change the individual's evaluation of the ability or increase his motivation, but the pressure cannot directly achieve conformity (Festinger, Torrey, and Willerman: 1954, 135). The effects of these differential pressures to uniformity on the individual will be discussed in the next section in terms of the effects of failure.

3. what sort of person am I for possessing that much X?

Once the reflexive self has been formed, the individual evaluates his adequacy and self-worth by internalizing the referent's evaluation of opinions, abilities and personality characteristics. This is the normative function of reference groups (Kelley: 1952, 413). The individual, by adopting the role of a significant individual or group, derives the positive, neutral, or negative evaluations of his opinions, abilities and personality characteristics that form his self-evaluation. Normative influences may affect performance not only directly, that is, by creating the motivation to achieve, but also indirectly, by guiding the individual's choice of referents for social comparison (Katz: 1967, 313). The referent individuals or groups one uses for normative, or evaluative, purposes are not necessarily those the individual uses for comparison purposes, although the two processes, normative and comparative, usually interact.

A person's assessment of himself, his self-descriptions and self-evaluations, is determined by his comparisons with others, his perceptions of how others evaluate him, and his internalization of their culture; their evaluations, values and expectations.

#### IV. FAILURE AND SELF-CONCEPT

An individual's reflexive self has been shown to develop in the process of interaction with others. The individual's successes and failures, vis-à-vis his internalized evaluations, values, and expectations, therefore continue to affect his self-concept. This section will elaborate a mechanism by which self-concept is affected by failure in order to build a model that delineates the specific effects of a failure situation on self-concept. An individual's failure, in this view, would result from an unfavorable comparison or evaluation of a salient personal dimension with respect to the comparison level or expectations set by others. Two types of failure situations result from this definition:

1. Where the individual does not internalize the expectations and evaluations of others in the social situation; and,
2. Where the individual has internalized the expectations and evaluations of others and views the expectations, or goals, and evaluations as his own.

Failure situations may potentially affect either the descriptive or evaluative aspects of selfhood.

Certainly a failure of the first type would not affect one's self-concept because the individual does not accept the perspective of the other as relevant or useful to himself and therefore does not conceive of

himself as failing. The individual's response to a failure of this sort will be discussed later in this section.

The second type of failure situation, however, can potentially represent a threat to the person's self-concept. Because the individual sees himself from the standpoint of the referent other, accepting the expectations of the other, the failure becomes relevant to his view of himself. The individual reacts to such a situation by attempting to determine what aspect of the internal or external environment is responsible for the failure; the individual must choose where to place the blame. Where the individual chooses to place the blame for the failure will determine the effect of that failure on his self-concept.

Attribution theory is concerned with "the process by which an individual interprets events as being caused by particular parts of the relatively stable environment" (Heider: 1958, 297). The failure is perceived by the person as being caused by either himself or the environment. "Attribution refers to the process of inferring or perceiving the dispositional properties of entities in the environment" (Kelley: 1967, 193), and is the process an individual uses to determine the causality of action; the individual attributes cause based on his understanding or perception of the forces working in the situation. Failure is perceived to be an additive function of the acting environmental and personal forces, where the personal forces represent the product of ability and trying:

$$\text{Failure} = F / [\text{Environmental forces} + \text{Personal forces (ability} \times \text{trying)}] \\ \text{(Heider: 1958 in Hastorf, Schneider, and Polefka: 1970).}$$

In order to make an attribution to personal, internal causality or environmental, external causality the person must estimate the relative strengths of each force.

The strength of the social or physical environmental forces derive from situation variables external to the person. If the person has perceived the cause of the failure to lie in the environment, he has inferred that his actions could not overcome the environmental obstacles; he was forced to fail by external circumstances beyond his control. The strength of the personal forces results from two internal characteristics: can and trying (Hastorf, Schneider and Polefka: 1970, 65-66). Can is a dispositional property which refers to an interaction between the internal forces of ability and task-specific external forces or obstacles such as the difficulty of the task. An attribution of the failure to ability therefore implies that the individual was incapable of succeeding in the particular situation because of forces internal to him. Trying or motivation also has two components: exertion and intention (Hastorf, Schneider and Polefka: 1970, 66). Exertion refers to the effort with which the individual put forth his strength, ability or force in the situation, while intention refers to the individual's choice of behaviors. Intention, or volition (Kelley: 1967, 217), is the individual's perception that when he makes a conscious choice from among alternatives he must have meant the resultant consequences to occur. "To the degree the effect of his selected action is different from those of others of other actions he might have taken the /actor/ has evidence of /his/ willful intention as a causal agent, exercising choice to cause a specific effect" (Kelley: 1967, 211-212). Placing the blame for his failure on trying or motivation, then, means that the individual perceives that he did not try hard enough to succeed at something he had chosen to do; if he had tried harder he would have succeeded, no environmental conditions or abilities were constraining him.

In any failure situation, the individual, reacting to the potentially ambiguous, contradictory cues of the situation and responses of referent others, may therefore perceive his failure to have resulted from the acting force of

the social or physical environment, his ability, or his motivation. Under what circumstances of failure, with what kinds of attributions, will the failure affect the person's self-concept? The implications of each attribution for the person's self-concept will now be discussed.

If the person attributes the failure to the acting environmental forces his self-concept will not be affected. The individual can understand and evaluate the dispositions of the environment, but these environmental dispositions say little about him. The individual therefore responds relative to the social or physical environment rather than change his self-concept. Because the social environment contains, among other things, the expectations others have for the individual, a failure situation of the first type described above, where the individual does not identify with the expectations of others, is an example of an environmental attribution. Another example of environmental attribution results from failure situations in which the individual has been prevented from realizing or achieving expectations or goals he has internalized by aspects of the social or physical environment (an environmental attribution in a failure situation of the second type described above). An individual's response to a social, environmental attribution may be placed into the framework provided by Merton's (1968) theory of deviant behavior. In Merton's analysis, the person who does not accept the goals proffered by the society may respond to failure with ritualism, retreatism, or rebellion, depending on whether he accepts, rejects, or seeks to replace the socially acceptable means by which those goals are achieved. Alternatively, if the person has internalized the expectations of his social environment but cannot achieve the goal in the traditional fashion because of forces external to himself, he may innovatively find new ways to succeed.

In instances where the individual attributes the failure to his ability, his self-description will be altered, and he will not negatively evaluate himself, unless he values the particular ability in and of itself. Jones and Davis (1965) present a model from which this proposition can be derived. Jones and Davis hypothesize that a person identifies his personality dispositions from his behavior in a two-step process: from acts to intentions, and from intentions to dispositions. The first step, from acts to intentions, occurs only in instances where the individual perceives he acts choicefully. If the individual perceives that his behavior was compelled, either internally or externally, he cannot determine what his intentions were in the situation. Realizing the implications of his intentions for an understanding of his dispositions is the next step of the process. The individual's conscious choice of one behavior, instead of another, allows him to make an estimate of his disposition; the behavior resulted from some aspect of himself that he can identify and evaluate. Because personality dispositions are central to self-evaluations, a failure will only affect an individual's self-evaluation if he is able to complete the "acts to dispositions" process. Abilities are relatively stable characteristics, dispositional properties of the individual. If the individual perceives his failure to be the result of his lack of ability, he can do little to bring his behavior into conformity with his goals; the individual either has the ability or he does not. The individual did not intend or choose to fail, he simply did not have the ability necessary to succeed. The person will therefore not re-evaluate himself but will add this additional information to his self-description through social comparison processes. There appears to be a contradiction here: ability is defined to be a disposition and yet the individual cannot negatively evaluate himself because he cannot infer disposition from failure perceived to result from

lack of ability. This paradox may be resolved by examining the types of dispositions involved. A person's self-evaluation emanates from how he feels about his dispositions and ability is a relatively choiceless dispositional property of the individual. Assuming that the ability is perceived to have no inherent value, one cannot evaluate the kind of person one is, make self-evaluative judgements, from situations over which one has no control or choice. A person, therefore, only evaluates those of his personality dispositions which can be inferred from choiceful behavior, and failure due to lack of ability is not choiceful behavior. The failure will affect an individual's self-description because he is now in a position to realize that he does not possess a particular ability. But, no negative self-evaluation will result because the individual is not able to infer a personality disposition from his action (see Figure 1). The individual's self-evaluation may be affected, however, if the ability in question is valued by the individual, either positively or negatively.

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Figure 1  
From Acts to Self-Evaluations

Steps:	Person's Statement:
1. From acts to intentions	I chose to do this
2. From intentions to dispositions	I must be the sort of person who chooses to do these kind of things
3. From dispositions to self-evaluations	I like/dislike myself for being that kind of person

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The individual's belief system or evaluations may mediate the effect of an ability attribution. Specifically, an individual may equate his lack of a particular ability with a negative self-evaluation because of a belief or evaluation he has internalized (e.g. that left-handedness is a sign of



the devil, that possessing social skills makes one a better person). The particular belief may be part of the culture of the larger society or limited to the referent others of the social environment. Festinger (1954) seems to refer to this type of mediation when he states that:

In western culture, at any rate, there is a value set on doing better and better which means the higher the score on performance, the more desirable it is...There is a unidirectional drive upward in the case of abilities... (p. 124)

The person may feel better about himself when he has the ability and worse about himself when he does not; he has internalized the value placed on a particular ability by the referent others. A person's belief system may therefore serve as a mediator, allowing the individual to infer a self-evaluation from the lack of an ability where he otherwise could not.

If the lacking abilities are perceived as means to achieve a salient goal, an individual should respond by finding new ways to achieve the goal, redefining his goals, or withdrawing, being unable to meet an important and valued expectation. (Merton: 1968) (Cf. the consequences of preventing incomparability by Festinger: 1954, 137-138).

Because abilities are relatively stable over time, once having attributed an ability to himself and finding no adverse environmental conditions, the person must attribute the failure to his motivation. Attributing failure to a lack of motivation allows the individual to complete the "acts to dispositions" process and a negative self-evaluation and altered self-description will result. Motivation, like an opinion, is easily changed; the person can choose to try hard, try harder, or try harder still. Because the individual has chosen his motivation level, his behavior is intended and dispositional properties may be inferred. Dispositions inferred from an intention to fail to achieve something internalized as important will generally be negatively evaluated by the individual. The individual identifies with his negatively evaluated dispositions, incorporating them into his self-description, and



negatively evaluates himself through normative processes; self-stigmatization. The failure has led to a mismatch between his expectations and his behavior, and the degree to which the behavior is not caused by the environment or his ability, is the degree to which it must effect a change in his self-evaluation.

Where the individual chooses to place the blame for the failure, therefore, will determine the effect of that failure on his self-concept. One's self-concept, self-descriptions and self-evaluations, are therefore likely to be most certain when environmental forces are perceived to be relatively weak. An attribution to ability allows the individual to refine his self-description while an attribution to motivation affects the individual's self-evaluation and self-description.

Three points of the model presented here need to be further clarified and elaborated before this discussion is complete. 1) An individual will only attribute blame in the failure situation if the goal he was striving for is important to him, for, without this saliency, there will be no reason, no drive, to determine why he failed. Failure situations of the first type described above will be important to the individual only insofar as the referent serves other important comparative or normative functions for the individual. Failures of the second type are salient, by definition, and hence, the individual will attribute blame. A person's self-concept will potentially only be affected by salient situations. 2) The effects of attributions to the social or physical environment, ability, and motivation have been discussed as clear-cut and distinct for analytical purposes. In reality, the attribution categories tend to merge; an individual's attribution lies somewhere on a continuum defined by pure environmental, external factors on one end and pure motivational, internal factors on the other. Attributions solely to one's ability would lie

in the center of a continuum thus described. The effects of the attribution result from the mix of environmental, ability and/or motivational factors in the attribution. 3) Rarely does an individual immediately and unequivocally decide where to attribute causality in a situation; his attribution is usually formed by thought and discourse with others. The lasting effect of the failure on his self-concept will result from the attribution derived from this "thinking and talking it over" endeavor. The short-term effect will depend on his attribution at the time.

Support for the hypotheses of this section comes from experimental research in the area of other-attribution, the process of inferring the dispositions of others from their actions. The results of this research may be usefully, but cautiously, applied to the process of self-attribution. An individual will not as readily place the blame for his failure on his motivation as he will blame another failure on the motivation of the other. There are two reasons for this:

1. People attempt to protect or enhance their self-esteem and will therefore alter their perceptions of the situation in order to blame their ability or the environment; and,
2. A person generally knows more about his intentions than those of others and may therefore more easily exclude his as irrelevant to the situation (Kelley: 1967, 207).

Within these limitations, however, research by Hastorf, Kite, Gross, and Wolfe (1965), Jones and deCharms (1957), and Jones and Davis (1965) support the above propositions. Hastorf, et. al. (1965) generally found that:

Behavior seen as externally caused is not weighted as heavily in making evaluations of the behavior...Externally caused or forced behavior yields less qualitative information than does behavior which is seen as stemming from personal motives (p. 409).

Results of experiments performed by Jones and deCharms (1957) and Jones and Davis (1965) indicated that when hedonic relevance was high for the

observer, failing people are negatively evaluated to a lesser extent when they are perceived to fail because of their ability rather than their motivation.

#### V. GENERALIZED EXPECTANCY FOR CONTROL AND SELF-CONCEPT

An individual does not decide where to attribute blame in a purely objective fashion. Not only will the individual protect his self-esteem where possible, his previous experiences and attributions provide a perspective from which the present situation can be interpreted. If an individual has developed a predisposition to conceive of causality as deriving from either the environment or himself from his previous experiences, he will have a tendency to perceive selectively the ambiguous cues of a failure situation and will thus enter the attribution process predisposed to an environmental or personal attribution. Such are the implications of Rotter's (1966) work with generalized expectancy or locus for control. People, Rotter argues, develop a general notion of whether they are responsible for or control the situations of their life from their previous learning history. If the individual has perceived that rewards and punishments have accrued to him as a result of his behavior, he will generally tend to look for causation internally; he will be more internal. On the other hand, if he has not perceived the reinforcement to be contingent upon his behavior, he will be more external and will generally expect the social or physical environment to have caused the events of his life. Internals perceive that they have control in the situation and externals perceive that

they do not.<sup>1</sup> These two distinct responses are embodied in common expressions:

the internal - "How do I get myself into these things?"

the external - "why do these things keep happening to me?"

Internals and externals should therefore be apt to perceive selectively those aspects of the situation that are consonant with the way they view causation. Internals should be predisposed against environmental or ability attributions; such an attribution would belie the control they feel they have in the situation. In fact, internals should not perceive their abilities to be stable, unalterable characteristics; rather, internals should perceive that they have control over themselves, accomplishing anything if they try hard enough. Externals, alternatively, should attribute failure to the environment or their ability to remain consistent with their perception of causality.

The implications of an externality-internality dimension of personality for self-concept is apparent. The self-description of an external will be formed by the comparison of his abilities with other's while that of an internal will predominantly include those dispositions he has learned to infer from intentions. An external's self-evaluation will depend on the value his belief system places on particular abilities while the self-evaluation of an internal will be derived from the value he places on personality dispositions inferred by completing the "acts to dispositions" process.

Two qualifying points need to be made with respect to the above propositions. 1) People are more or less internal, more or less external.

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<sup>1</sup>Rotter's (1966) original work with locus of control indicated that higher status people tend to be more internal than lower status people (p. 18). This would imply that higher status people perceive that they have choices in the situation and that the outcome represents a conscious decision. These results would be predicted by Coser's (1975) analysis presented earlier. Higher-status people are more likely to develop a well-formed reflexive self because of the choices they must make between competing expectations for behavior. An individual's perception of these "self-forming" choices would tend to make him an internal.

Although internality and externality have been presented as a dichotomy, the internality-externality dimension is actually a continuum. The degree to which an individual is predisposed to attribute internally or externally, will therefore depend on where along the continuum he falls. 2) The locus of control dimension of personality predisposes the individual to look for causality in certain aspects of a particular situation; internality-externality does not determine the attribution. Other factors, such as self-confidence, may interact with locus of control or affect attribution directly.

Support for an internality-externality dimension in personality comes from the psychological study of aggression. Rosensweig's (1944, 1945) work with frustration-reaction has identified three personality types derived from characterologically different ways of expressing aggression:

Extrapunitiveness: Aggression is employed overtly and directed toward the personal or impersonal environment in the form of emphasizing the extent of the frustrating situation, blaming an outside agency for the frustration, or placing some other person under obligation to solve the problem in hand...The associated emotions are anger and resentment...

Impunitiveness: Aggression is evaded or avoided in any overt form, and the frustrating situation is described as insignificant, as no one's fault, or as likely to be ameliorated by just waiting and conforming...

Intropunitiveness: Aggression is employed overtly, but directed by the subject against himself in the form of martyrlike acceptance of the frustration as beneficial, acknowledgement of guilt or shame, or an assumption of responsibility for correcting the frustrating situation. (Rosenweig: 1945, 8)

Extrapunitiveness closely resembles what has previously been described as an external reaction, no assumption of responsibility or attribution of control, and intropunitiveness appears to be the behavioral correlate of an internal reaction, perceived responsibility and control. Impunitiveness seems either to reduce the saliency of the situation or attribute the situation to a lack of ability, the latter an external response.

## VI. SUMMARY OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL

The individual's generalized expectancy for situations to arise from predominantly internal or environmental forces has been shown to affect the attribution process that results from an individual's failure to achieve a salient goal. The resultant attribution will determine the effect of the failure on an individual's self-concept. If the individual attributes his failure to environmental or external forces, his self-concept will not be affected. Internal attributions, on the other hand, will affect his self-concept. Unless the person has internalized a value his referent others place on the particular ability, an ability attribution will only affect self-descriptions. An attribution to one's motivation will result in self-stigmatization or negative self-evaluations; the individual has internalized the value others place on his personality dispositions. The continual development of one's self-concept, composed of both self-descriptions and self-evaluations, may therefore be affected by situations of personal failure. The answer to the question posed at the outset, "What happens to a person's view of himself when he fails?" therefore seems to be "it depends on what he chooses to blame."

## VII. HYPOTHESES AND PROCEDURE

The previous sections have elaborated the situational and individual differences which mediate the effects of failure on self-concept. The validity of the theoretical model developed from an integration of these differences will be tested through the empirical examination of three of its central hypotheses:

### Hypothesis #1 - Situational Differences

where the individual chooses to place the blame for his failure will determine the effect of that failure on his self-concept. Specifically, an attribution to one's motivation will have a more deleterious effect on self-evaluation than will either an ability or environmental attribution.

### Hypothesis #2 - Individual Differences

Internals should be predisposed to attribute their failure to their motivation while externals should be more likely to attribute their failure to the environment or their ability.

### Hypothesis #3 (Derived from #1 and #2)

Internals, to a greater extent than externals, should evaluate themselves negatively when they fail.

These three hypotheses were operationalized in a questionnaire administered to 122 undergraduate students at a small, midwestern college (see Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire and a description of the administration procedure). Rotter's (1966) work with the internal-external dimension of personality indicated that college academic experience tended to increase the internality of the students. In order to insure that the external end of the continuum would be adequately represented in the sample, people with fewer years of college were over-selected. Respondents were obtained from introductory social and natural science courses.<sup>2</sup>

Each respondent was asked to complete four sets of questions. Two of these, Rotter's (1966) Internal-External Scale and Gough and Heilbrun's (1965)

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<sup>2</sup>The final sample contained 72 freshmen, 30 sophmores, and 19 upperclassmen. Their mean internal-external score was 11.7, roughly the midpoint of the Internal-External Scale that ranges from zero (0), or pure internal, to 23, pure external. This non-random sampling procedure produced 60 males, 61 females, 101 whites and 9 blacks.



Adjective Checklist, were used to measure the respondents' internality-externality and self-confidence,<sup>3</sup> respectively. A third series of questions obtained information about the respondents' general demographic background.

The Dependent variables, the respondents' attributions in salient failure situations and the effect of these attributions on their self-evaluations, were measured by their responses to a series of ten hypothetical failure situations.<sup>4</sup> Each situation was constructed to make the actor fail at something important to him but to leave the cause of the failure ambiguous. Five possible causes for the failure were provided after each situation. Each located the cause for the failure at a different point on the environment-motivation attribution continuum. That is, the first response attributed the failure to the actor's environment alone, the second to his environment and ability, the third to his ability alone, the fourth to his ability and motivation, and the fifth to his motivation alone. Respondents were asked to imagine themselves in each situation and to indicate the cause that most closely matched the way they would account for the situation. To allow for

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<sup>3</sup>Since the literature had indicated that people tend to protect their estimations of self-worth by modifying their self-attributions, some measure of the respondents' ego-strength was deemed necessary for a complete interpretation of their attributions. The self-confidence internal scale of the Gough and Heilbrun (1965) Adjective Checklist would provide a measure of the respondents' ego-strength in addition to being another indicator of their perceived efficacy or sense of control.

<sup>4</sup>The ten hypothetical situations presented to respondents were selected from thirteen situations pretested on 22 respondents. The factor analysis of the pretested situations revealed that two situations were not related to dimensions underlying the other situations and these were therefore not used in the final version of the questionnaire. A third situation was eliminated because most of the respondents attributed their failure to the environment alone. The attribution responses provided for the ten remaining situations were modified slightly in an attempt to improve the distribution of attributions.



the possibility that a respondent might consider none of the five alternatives an adequate representation of his explanation for the failure, a blank space was provided for him to provide his own. These open-ended responses were later coded into the five attribution categories (see Appendix B for a description of the coders' training and a copy of the coding instrument).

Once the respondents had completed these items, they were asked to reconsider the situations, one at a time, and, given the attributions they had made, to record the degree to which their self-esteem would be affected by each. They were asked to imagine that their feelings of self-esteem were worth ten points when they were feeling as good about themselves as possible. They were then asked to indicate how many points they would subtract from the ten for their performance in each situation. The number of points a respondent subtracted from the ten was used to measure the effect his attribution had on his self-evaluation.

Since it was recognized that a respondent's self-esteem might not be affected by a failure unless the failure were salient to him, one final set of questions was included to determine the saliency of the situations to the respondents. Respondents were asked to reread the hypothetical situations once again but this time to indicate how easy it would be for them to imagine themselves in each. The ease with which a respondent could imagine himself in each situation was used to measure its saliency to him.

## VIII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Hypothesis #1

Where the individual chooses to place the blame for his failure will determine the effect of that failure on his self-concept. Specifically, an attribution to one's motivation will have a more deleterious effect on self-evaluation than will either an ability or environmental attribution.

From Table 1 it should be clear that the respondents tended to subtract more points from their self-esteem when they attributed failure to themselves than when they attributed failure to the environment. In seven of the ten situations, there were positive, significant relationships ( $p=.05$  or less) between increasingly personal, choiceful attributions and increasingly negative self-evaluations.<sup>5</sup>

The data was simplified for further analysis. The number of total attributions to the environment, environment and ability, ability, ability and motivation, and motivation, were computed for each respondent in order to determine whether or not respondents who tended to make personal motivational attributions also subtracted the largest number of points from their self-esteem. The mean number of times each type of attribution was selected by the respondents appears in Table 2. Based on these means, attribution categories 1 and 2 were combined to form an environmental attribution, categories 4 and 5 were combined into a motivation attribution, and category 3 remained an ability attribution. Each respondent was categorized as either a high or low chooser of environment attributions, a high or low chooser of ability attributions, and a high or low chooser of motivational attributions. Respondents were also empirically divided according to the total number of points they subtracted from their self-esteem: high, or great effect on self-esteem, medium, or moderate effect on self-esteem, and low, or small effect on self-esteem (criteria for all empirical categories are listed in Appendix C).

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<sup>5</sup>The saliency of the situation to the respondent did not seem to affect this relationship. When the effect of the respondents' identification was removed from the correlations (through partial correlation), no significant differences resulted. This variable is therefore not included in the subsequent analysis.

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONDENTS' ATTRIBUTIONS<sup>a</sup>  
AND THE NUMBER OF POINTS SUBTRACTED FROM THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Situation number:	Tau C=:	p=:
1	.130	.017
2	.114	.035
3	.151	.007
4	.052	.203
5	.110	.036
6	.142	.011
7	.102	.059
8	-.051	.205
9	.278	.000
10	.111	.037

<sup>a</sup>the low end of the attribution continuum is the environment,  
the high end is motivation; ability is the midpoint

TABLE 2

MEAN DISTRIBUTION OF ATTRIBUTIONS ACROSS  
HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS

Type of attribution:	Mean number of attributions:
environment	1.5 responses
environment and ability	2.0 responses
ability	2.5 responses
ability and motivation	1.8 responses
motivation	1.8 responses

The relationship between the respondents' attribution tendencies and their tendency to subtract points from their self-esteem is shown in Table 3. As predicted, the self-evaluation of relatively high choosers of environmental attributions was affected significantly less by the failure situations than the self-esteem of relatively low choosers ( $\tau C = -.224$ ,  $p = .0001$ ). Conversely, higher choosers of ability attributions subtracted a significantly larger number of points from their self-esteem than did low choosers ( $\tau C = .137$ ,  $p = .013$ ). Similarly, higher choosers of motivation attributions subtracted a significantly larger number of points from their self-esteem than low choosers ( $\tau C = .135$ ,  $p = .014$ ). Those who attributed failure to their personal force did seem to be more affected by the failure situations than those who attributed failure to external forces, as previously indicated in Table 1. However, Hypothesis 1 implies that the attributions a person makes to his motivation will have a greater negative impact on his self-esteem than the attributions he makes to his ability. High choosers of motivational attributions should have subtracted significantly more points from their self-esteem than high choosers of ability attributions. Inspection of the figures contained in the table reveals that while high choosers of motivation attributions subtracted more points from their self-esteem than high choosers of environment attributions, they did not subtract significantly more points than high choosers of ability attributions. There are two possible explanations for these findings: 1) The ability and motivation distinction is unimportant; the effect of attribution on self-esteem is determined by whether the person perceives the cause to lie within him or external to him; or 2) Individual differences may mediate the effect that attributions in failure situations

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONDENTS' ATTRIBUTION TENDENCIES AND  
TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS SUBTRACTED FROM SELF-ESTEEM

Attribution tendency:	Total number of points subtracted from self-esteem:			(N)	Tau C=:	p=:
	High	Medium	Low			
Environment						
high choosers	25.8	33.9	40.3	(62)	-.224	.000
low choosers	43.9	31.6	24.6	(57)		
Ability						
high choosers	41.5	30.2	28.3	(53)	.137	.013
low choosers	28.8	34.8	36.4	(66)		
Motivation						
high choosers	41.4	29.3	29.3	(58)	.135	.014
low choosers	27.9	36.1	36.1	(61)		

TABLE 4

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONDENTS' INTERNALITY-EXTERNALITY  
AND ATTRIBUTION TENDENCY

Attribution tendency:	Internals	Externals	Tau B=:	p=:
Environment				
high choosers	57.1	45.8	.113	.030
low choosers	42.9	54.2		
Ability				
high choosers	30.2	57.6	-.277	.000
low choosers	69.8	42.4		
Motivation				
high choosers	54.0	42.4	.116	.028
low choosers	46.0	57.6		
(N)	(63)	(59)		

have on self-esteem. The relative validity of these two explanations is examined in the testing of Hypothesis #3.

#### Hypothesis #2

Internals should be predisposed to attribute their failure to their motivation while externals should be more likely to attribute their failure to the environment or their ability.

In Table 4 the attribution tendencies of relatively internal respondents are compared with those of relatively external respondents. Externals more than internals tended to choose ability attributions (Tau B=-.277,  $p=.00000$ ) while internals more than externals tended to choose motivation attributions (Tau B=.116,  $p=.028$ ). Unexpectedly, however, internals were higher choosers of environmental attributions than externals (Tau B=.113,  $p=.030$ ). Respondents subtracted fewer points from their self-esteem when they attributed their failure to the environment. It was likely that environmental attributions could be a major way to rationalize failure in order to protect self-esteem. The fact that internals were more self-confident than externals (Tau B=.134,  $p=.013$ ) may indicate that internals were more protective of their self-esteem than externals and therefore tended to rationalize their failures more. People in general may be differentially affected by failure depending on their level of self-confidence. It seems reasonable that persons with high self-confidence would have more at stake in a failure situation and would therefore tend to justify their failures by making attributions to the environment whenever possible. Indeed, respondents with higher self-confidence tended to blame the environment more than respondents with lower self-confidence (Tau B=.167,  $p=.003$ ) while respondents with lower self-confidence tended to attribute their failure to their motivation

(Tau B=-.101,  $p=.047$ ). There were no significant differences between the the number of ability attributions made by respondents with high self-confidence and respondents with low self-confidence. It was therefore necessary to examine the combined effects of respondents' internality-externality and their self-confidence on their attributions. This relationship is presented in Table 5.

As expected, internals' and externals' level of self-confidence made a difference in their attributions. There was no significant difference in the number of environmental attributions made by internals with high self-confidence as compared to externals with high self-confidence. These two groups of respondents chose environmental attributions more often than they chose either ability or motivational attributions. Thus, they seem to be protecting their self-esteem. Since there were more internals with high self-confidence in the sample than externals with high self-confidence, a higher proportion of internals than externals were opting for environment attributions to protect their self-esteem.

Among respondents with low self-confidence, internals, more than externals, tended to blame their failure on the environment (Tau B=.210,  $p=.006$ ). A significantly larger proportion of externals with high self-confidence chose to attribute their failure to the environment than did externals with low self-confidence (Tau B=-.242,  $p=.003$ ). Among internals, there was no significant difference in the proportion of internals with high self-confidence versus low self-confidence who made attributions to the environment. A higher proportion of externals than internals consistently chose more ability attributions (among respondents with high self-confidence: Tau B=-.188,  $p=.019$ ; among respondents with low self-confidence: Tau B=-.333,

TABLE 5

EFFECT OF RESPONDENTS' INTERNALITY-EXTERNALITY  
AND SELF-CONFIDENCE ON THEIR ATTRIBUTION TENDENCIES

Attribution tendency:	High Self-Confidence			Low Self-Confidence		
	Internals	Externals	Tau B=: p=:	Internals	Externals	Tau B=: p=:
Environment						
H. choosers	59.4	60.9	NS	57.1	36.1	.210 .000
L. choosers	40.6	39.1		42.9	63.9	
Ability						
H. choosers	37.5	56.5	-.188 .019	25.0	58.3	-.333 .000
L. choosers	62.5	43.5		75.0	41.7	
Motivation						
H. choosers	56.3	26.1	.300 .000	53.6	52.8	NS
L. choosers	43.8	73.9		46.4	47.2	
	(N) (32)	(23)		(28)	(36)	



$p=.0004$ ). While there were no significant differences among the proportions of externals with high self-confidence and those with low self-confidence choosing ability attributions, a larger proportion of internals with high self-confidence than internals with low self-confidence blamed their ability for their failure ( $\text{Tau } B=.134$ ,  $p=.062$ ). Among the respondents who made a large number of attributions to their motivation, there was a significantly larger proportion of internals with high self-confidence than externals with high self-confidence ( $\text{Tau } B=.300$ ,  $p=.0005$ ). There was no significant difference in the proportion of internals with low self-confidence and the proportion of externals with low self-confidence who made attributions to their motivation for failing. Externals with low self-confidence chose significantly more motivation attributions than did externals with high self-confidence ( $\text{Tau } B=-.263$ ,  $p=.001$ ). There was no significant difference between the proportions of internals with high self-confidence and internals with low self-confidence who were high choosers of motivation attributions. Apparently, self-confidence and internality-externality differentiate four different types of people, in terms of the self-attributions they make.

Internals with low self-confidence perceive that they should be able to control situations but have not been successful at exerting control. In other words, they may believe that their personal force is insufficient to overcome the forces of the situation. Internals with low self-confidence feel inadequate in comparison to the environment and feel they must work harder. An ability attribution would only result in instances where they have perceived a limit on what their increased efforts could accomplish. If this characterization is correct, when these respondents choose to attribute their failure to the environment or their motivation, their self-

evaluation should be reduced; strong environmental forces point to the inadequacy of their effort. When these respondents perceive themselves to be incapable of success, blaming their lack of ability, their self-esteem should not be affected; increased effort could not bring success. These correlations will be examined when Hypothesis #3 is tested.

Externals with low self-confidence perceive that what happens to them is a result of factors they cannot control, luck or fate. Since apparently they have not been successful in achieving their goals (therefore their low self-confidence), they may infer that luck is not with them. They may feel unworthy of fate or luck or feel that in order to achieve their goals they must compete with the natural forces of fate. But they have not been successful competitors in the past so what reason would they have to feel efficacious about the future. If these respondents make inferences of this type, when they are able to blame the environment for a failure they should not evaluate themselves negatively. However, when they are unable to blame themselves, they should reduce their estimate of self-worth.

Externals with high self-confidence, like externals with low self-confidence perceive themselves to be at the mercy of forces they cannot control. Unlike externals with low self-confidence, however, they have benefited from these forces; they have been lucky. These people have been involved in many situations in which the situational demands and their abilities have coincided. For them, failure situations result when the situational demands and their abilities are not coincident. These people should not evaluate themselves negatively when they attribute their failure to the environment, but they may negatively evaluate themselves if they perceive their abilities to be at fault.

Internals with high self-confidence have achieved their previous goals through their own initiative and effort; they perceive that they have controlled the situations of their life to their advantage. If they try hard enough, they will achieve their future goals. When these people perceive inabilities in themselves, they do not necessarily feel helpless to overcome them. Rather, they may increase their efforts to develop the ability. If these people blame environmental forces for their failures, their self-esteem should not be affected. In contrast, if these people feel that their ability or motivation is at fault, the perception that they could have succeeded if they had only tried harder should reduce their self-esteem.

### Hypothesis #3

Internals, to a greater extent than externals, should evaluate themselves negatively when they fail.

Given the significant differences in attributions among the four types of respondents described above, it is not surprising that externals, more than internals, evaluated themselves negatively when they fail (Tau C=-.132,  $p=.015$ ). That internals chose to attribute failure to the environment significantly more than externals did indicates that they, more than externals, avoid negative self-evaluations. However, if their self-confidence was high, they subtracted fewer points from their self-esteem when they failed than internals with low self-confidence (Tau C=-.144,  $p=.048$ ). Among externals it was also those with high self-confidence who subtracted significantly fewer points from their self-esteem (Tau C=-.276,  $p=.0008$ ) (see Table 6).

Externals with high self-confidence and internals with high self-confidence did not differ significantly in the total number of points they

TABLE 6

EFFECT OF RESPONDENTS' INTERNALITY-EXTERNALITY  
AND SELF-CONFIDENCE ON TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS SUBTRACTED  
FROM SELF-ESTEEM

Total number of points subtracted:	High Self-Confidence		Low Self-Confidence	
	Internals	Externals	Internals	Externals
High	31.3	21.7	35.7	44.4
Medium	18.8	43.5	32.1	38.9
Low	50.0	34.8	32.1	16.7
(N)	(32)	(23)	(28)	(36)
Tau C=:	-.144		-.276	
p=:	.048		.001	

subtracted for failure. Externals with low self-confidence and internals with low self-confidence did differ significantly in the number of points they subtracted ( $\text{Tau } C = -.156, p = .013$ ). Externals with low self-confidence apparently evaluated themselves more negatively as a result of failing than internals with low self-confidence. In fact, of all four groups of respondents, externals with low self-confidence subtracted the largest number of points for failing. Externals with high self-confidence and internals with high self-confidence subtracted the least; the two groups of high self-confident respondents subtracted significantly less points than the two groups of low self-confident respondents ( $\text{Tau } C = -.221, p = .0002$ ).

Central to this analysis are the specific attributions that are associated with these groups' tendencies to subtract or not to subtract points from their self-esteem. Table 7 illustrates the relationship between the respondents' attribution tendency and their subtraction of points, according to whether they were internal or external and whether their self-confidence was high or low. As shown in the table, internals with high self-confidence negatively evaluate themselves when they attribute their failure to their ability ( $\text{Tau } C = .312, p = .005$ ) or their motivation ( $\text{Tau } C = .234, p = .026$ ) but not when they attribute their failure to the environment ( $\text{Tau } C = -.312, p = .005$ ). Externals with high self-confidence evaluate themselves negatively when they perceive their failure to have resulted from a lack of ability ( $\text{Tau } C = -.209, p = .052$ ), but not when they perceive it to stem from the environment ( $\text{Tau } C = -.289, p = .024$ ). The attributions the high self-confident respondents, whether internal or external, make to the environment seem to be defense mechanisms they employ. Were they to make ability or motivation attributions, their self-esteem would suffer more.

TABLE 7

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTRIBUTION TENDENCIES AND  
TOTAL NUMBER OF POINTS SUBTRACTED FOR FOUR GROUPS OF RESPONDENTS

Attribution tendency:	Environment		Ability		Motivation	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Total number of points subtracted:	<u>Internals - High Self-Confidence</u>					
High	15.8	53.8	50.0	20.0	44.4	14.3
Medium	26.3	7.7	16.7	20.0	11.1	28.6
Low	57.9	38.5	33.3	60.0	44.4	57.1
(N)	(19)	(13)	(12)	(20)	(18)	(14)
Tau C=:	-.312		.312		.234	
p=:	.005		.005		.026	
	<u>Internals - Low Self-Confidence</u>					
High	37.5	33.3	28.6	38.1	33.3	38.5
Medium	31.3	33.3	14.3	38.1	40.0	23.1
Low	31.3	33.3	57.1	23.8	26.7	36.5
(N)	(16)	(12)	(7)	(21)	(15)	(13)
Tau C=:	NS		-.209		NS	
p=:			.052			
	<u>Externals - High Self-Confidence</u>					
High	14.3	33.3	30.8	10.0	16.7	23.5
Medium	42.9	44.4	38.5	50.0	33.3	47.1
Low	42.9	22.2	30.8	40.0	50.0	29.4
(N)	(14)	(9)	(13)	(10)	(6)	(17)
Tau C=:	-.289		.198		NS	
p=:	.024		.088			
	<u>Externals - Low Self-Confidence</u>					
High	38.5	47.8	47.6	40.0	52.6	35.3
Medium	38.5	39.1	38.1	40.0	36.8	41.2
Low	23.1	13.0	14.3	20.0	10.5	23.5
(N)	(13)	(23)	(21)	(15)	(19)	(17)
Tau C=:	NS		NS		.216	
p=:					.028	

Internals with low self-confidence tend not to evaluate themselves negatively when they attribute their failure to their ability ( $\text{Tau } C = -.209$ ,  $p = .052$ ). Internals with low self-confidence evaluate themselves more negatively when they perceive their failure to be the result of the environment or their motivation (although these relationships are not significant) than when they perceive their failures to be the result of their lack of ability. This lends some support to the earlier suggestion that when this group blames their ability there is nothing further they can do, and they need not negatively evaluate themselves. However, when they blame the environment or their motivation then they infer that have not tried hard enough; they should increase their efforts.

Comparisons between the two groups of internals reveal that those with high self-confidence evaluate their lack of ability negatively, while those with low self-confidence do not. This gives some support to the previously discussed notion that internals with high self-confidence are using ability attributions to indicate aspects of themselves where further effort is necessary. No other validation of this interpretation is possible with the data.

When externals with low self-confidence attribute their failure to their motivation, a negative self-evaluation results ( $\text{Tau } C = .216$ ,  $p = .028$ ). Perhaps these people feel unworthy or helpless in their attempts to combat the forces of fate. Externals with high self-confidence evaluate themselves negatively when they perceive their failure to result from inability, but externals with low self-confidence do not evaluate themselves negatively when they perceive their failure to result from their ability to a significant extent. Perhaps externals with high self-confidence feel that

their lack of ability has prevented them from taking advantage of situations offered to them, while externals with low self-confidence feel that their abilities are an aspect of the forces they are unsuccessfully attempting to combat.

The reason why high choosers of ability attributions and high choosers of motivational attributions subtracted an equal number of points from their self-esteem should now be clear. The effect of the respondents' attributions depended not only on their internality-externality, but also on their level of self-confidence. Respondents with high self-confidence, whether internal or external, evaluated themselves negatively when they perceived their failure to be the result of their inability; internals with high self-confidence and externals with low self-confidence evaluated themselves negatively when they perceived their failure to result from their inadequate motivation.

## IX. SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS

### Hypothesis #1

1. When persons with high self-confidence attribute their failures to the environment, their self-esteem appears to be relatively unaffected.
2. The self-esteem of internals with high self-confidence appears to be affected when they attribute their failure to their ability; the self-esteem of internals with low self-confidence appears to be relatively unaffected.
3. When internals with high self-confidence and externals with low self-confidence blame their motivation for their failure, they tend to lower their estimates of self-esteem.



Hypothesis #2

1. In general, internals tend to attribute their failure to the environment or their motivation. Internals with high self-confidence choose ability attributions more often than internals with low self-confidence.
2. In general, externals tend to attribute failure to their ability. Externals with high self-confidence attribute failure to the environment most often but also to their ability. Externals with low self-confidence attribute failure to their ability most often but also to their motivation.

Hypothesis #3

1. Externals with low self-confidence appear to evaluate themselves more negatively when they fail than any other group of respondents.
2. In failure situations, internals with low self-confidence evaluate themselves less negatively than externals with low self-confidence, but more negatively than internals with high self-confidence.

## X. CONCLUSION

Four distinct responses to failure situations have been revealed by the analysis of the combined effects of the respondents' internality-externality and self-confidence on the attribution and self-stigmatization processes resulting from failure situations.

Internals with high self-confidence respond to failure situations by attributing their failure to the acting environmental forces or to their motivation. Environmental attributions seemed to protect this groups' self-esteem while motivational attributions resulted in negative self-evaluations. When this group of respondents chose to attribute their failure to inability, their self-esteem was negatively effected, possibly to indicate where further effort is needed.

Internals with low self-confidence attribute their failure to the environment or their motivation. The self-esteem of this group of respondents is affected by environmental or motivational attributions to a greater extent than by ability attributions. This group apparently perceives that effort is needed to overcome the strong situational forces; environmental attributions point to the inadequacy of their effort.

Attributions to the environment and to their ability predominate among the externals with high self-confidence. These two attributions reveal this groups' perceived lack of control in situations. As among internals with high self-confidence, environmental attributions protect this group's estimate of self-worth while ability attributions have negative effects.

Among externals with low self-confidence, ability and motivation attributions predominate. Motivational attributions, among this group

result in negative self-evaluations. These negative self-evaluations may result from a perception of unworthiness or helplessness in combating the forces of fate or luck.

These results indicate that internals and externals do not necessarily attribute causality in failure situations in ways consonant with their perception of causality. Neither does the analysis demonstrate that the respondents' attributions in the failure situations determine the effect of the failure on their self-evaluation. Instead, the respondents' reactions to failure situations seems to depend on the combined effect of the internal-external and self-confidence dimensions of their personality, that is, whether they are internal or external and have high or low self-confidence.

The self-evaluation component of self-concept seems to be affected by situations of individual failure. However, the process by which self-evaluations are modified seems to vary across these four groups of respondents. In general, externals appear to derive negative self-evaluations from their belief system. Externals with high self-confidence seem to have internalized the value their referent others place on particular abilities and therefore negative self-evaluations result when they perceive a lack of ability. Externals with low self-confidence may have internalized the negative evaluation placed on helplessness and thus their self-evaluation suffers when they have not tried hard enough to overcome their fate, that is, the situational constraints and their abilities.

In contrast, negative self-evaluations seem to result in internals when they attribute their failure to their motivation and complete the

"acts to dispositions" attribution process, described earlier. Internals with high self-confidence may also infer dispositions from ability attributions if the attribution is indicating that they have not worked hard enough to improve that ability. Internals with low self-confidence may be the only group that has not internalized the values placed on abilities per se. This group of respondents seemed to infer negative self-evaluations only after completing the "acts to dispositions" process; they cannot infer intention or choice from ability attributions.

The effect of failure on self-concept seems to depend on the internal-external and self-confidence dimensions of the actor and where he chooses to attribute cause in the failure situation.

## APPENDIX A .

### Questionnaire and Questionnaire Administration

The questionnaire contained on the following pages was used to operationalize the hypotheses presented in the paper. The researcher administered the questionnaire to groups of respondents that varied in size from two people to twenty-eight people. After receiving the following verbal introduction to the study, respondents were given the questionnaire:

Hello, my name is Merle Sprinzen. I am a senior, majoring in sociology, and am in the process of completing my honors project. My research is attempting to examine the extent to which certain kinds of attitudes form the basis for responses to problematic social situations. I have three series of questions for you to answer that will help me to study this process, in addition to some questions about your background. The first series of questions is concerned with your perceptions about the way things happen in the world. The second part includes a set of hypothetical problem situations to which I would like you to respond. The third series includes a list of adjectives; you will be asked to indicate those which you perceive to be descriptive of your own personality. Please complete one section before moving on to the next section. I realize that these questions will take some time to answer and I greatly appreciate your cooperation in providing me with the valuable data I will need to complete my research. Additional people will be taking this questionnaire and I therefore ask you to please not discuss the nature of the questions I have asked with anyone else.

The questionnaire generally took thirty to forty-five minutes to complete.

## GENERAL ATTITUDE QUESTIONS

The following pairs of statements deal with perceptions people frequently have about the world. For each pair, select the statement that most closely approximates your own attitude and circle the letter corresponding to that statement. Be sure to select the one you actually believe to be more true rather than the one you think you should choose or the one you would like to be true. This is a measure of personal belief and therefore there are no right or wrong answers. Try to choose one, and only one, alternative even in instances where you may feel equally strong about both statements or not very strongly about either.

1. a. Children get into trouble because their parents punish them too much.  
b. The trouble with most children nowadays is that their parents are too easy with them.
2. a. Many of the unhappy things in people's lives are partly due to bad luck.  
b. People's misfortunes result from the mistakes they make.
3. a. One of the major reasons why we have wars is because people don't take enough interest in politics.  
b. There will always be wars, no matter how hard people try to prevent them.
4. a. In the long run people get the respect they deserve in this world.  
b. Unfortunately, an individual's worth often passes unrecognized no matter how hard he tries.
5. a. The idea that teachers are unfair to students is nonsense.  
b. Most students don't realize the extent to which their grades are influenced by accidental happenings.
6. a. Without the right breaks one cannot be an effective leader.  
b. Capable people who fail to become leaders have not taken advantage of their opportunities.
7. a. No matter how hard you try some people just don't like you.  
b. People who can't get others to like them don't understand how to get along with others.
8. a. Heredity plays the major role in determining one's personality.  
b. It is one's experiences in life which determine what they're like.
9. a. I have often found that what is going to happen will happen.  
b. Trusting to fate has never turned out as well for me as making a decision to take a definite course of action.
10. a. In the case of the well prepared student there is rarely if ever such a thing as an unfair test.  
b. Many times exam questions tend to be so unrelated to course work that studying is really useless.
11. a. Becoming a success is a matter of hard work, luck has little or nothing to do with it.  
b. Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.
12. a. The average citizen can have an influence in government decisions.  
b. This world is run by the few people in power, and there is not much the little guy can do about it.
13. a. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.  
b. It is not always wise to plan too far ahead because many things turn out to be a matter of good or bad fortune anyhow.

14. a. There are certain people who are just no good.  
b. There is some good in everybody.
15. a. In my case getting what I want has little or nothing to do with luck.  
b. Many times we might just as well decide what to do by flipping a coin.
16. a. Who gets to be the boss often depends on who was lucky enough to be in the right place first.  
b. Getting people to do the right thing depends upon ability, luck has little or nothing to do with it.
17. a. As far as world affairs are concerned, most of us are the victims of forces we can neither understand, nor control.  
b. By taking an active part in political and social affairs the people can control world events.
18. a. Most people don't realize the extent to which their lives are controlled by accidental happenings.  
b. There really is no such thing as "luck."
19. a. One should always be willing to admit mistakes.  
b. It is usually best to cover up one's mistakes.
20. a. It is hard to know whether or not a person really likes you.  
b. How many friends you have depends upon how nice a person you are.
21. a. In the long run the bad things that happen to us are balanced by the good ones.  
b. Most misfortunes are the result of lack of ability, ignorance, laziness, or all three.
22. a. With enough effort we can wipe out political corruption.  
b. It is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office.
23. a. Sometimes I can't understand how teachers arrive at the grades they give.  
b. There is a direct connection between how hard I study and the grades I get.
24. a. A good leader expects people to decide for themselves what they should do.  
b. A good leader makes it clear to everybody what their jobs are.
25. a. Many times I feel that I have little influence over the things that happen to me.  
b. It is impossible for me to believe that chance or luck plays an important role in my life.
26. a. People are lonely because they don't try to be friendly.  
b. There's not much use in trying too hard to please people, if they like you, they like you.
27. a. There is too much emphasis on athletics in high school.  
b. Team sports are an excellent way to build character.
28. a. What happens to me is my own doing.  
b. Sometimes I feel that I don't have enough control over the direction my life is taking.
29. a. Most of the time I can't understand why politicians behave the way they do.  
b. In the long run the people are responsible for bad government on a national as well as on a local level.

## HYPOTHETICAL PROBLEM SITUATIONS

The following questions are hypothetical situations that create problems for people. When actually faced with the problems described, different people may account for their behavior in different ways. What I would like to know is how you would respond. Read each situation carefully. Imagine that the events described are actually happening to you. After you have determined how you would account for your behavior in these situations, choose the one statement from those provided that comes closest to your feelings about it. If there is no response that approximates your reaction in any way, indicate your response in the space provided.

### Situation #1

You are visiting some friends in a large city and have decided to explore the city while your friends are at work. On the way to the art museum you get lost. You stop a person to ask for directions, but the directions he gives do not take you to the museum. You ask another person for the way to the museum, but you still do not find the museum.

- a. \_\_\_ The people I asked gave me wrong directions.
- b. \_\_\_ The people I asked should have been more careful about giving me instructions since I obviously did not know where I was going.
- c. \_\_\_ I'm not very good at following directions when I don't know a place.
- d. \_\_\_ I could have understood their instructions better if I had looked at a map.
- e. \_\_\_ If I had really studied a map, I would have found the museum.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):



### Situation #2

It is the night of your senior recital, one of the most important performances of your conservatory career. You have been preparing for the recital since the beginning of the year. When the performance is over, you realize that it did not go well.

- a. \_\_\_\_ My performance was fine, the audience simply didn't understand the music I played.
- b. \_\_\_\_ If I had thought about the way audiences usually interpret these kinds of pieces, I would have selected another piece.
- c. \_\_\_\_ I guess I didn't have the technique to make the piece meaningful to that audience.
- d. \_\_\_\_ I should have spent more time preparing the piece. Then I would have been certain that it was the audience and not me.
- e. \_\_\_\_ If I had practiced harder, even that audience would have felt the strengths of the piece.
- f. \_\_\_\_ (other):

### Situation #3

The department faculty members, graduate students, and other honors students have gathered for the first of a series of meetings to discuss honors papers. You are to present the theories and hypotheses you have developed for your honors paper over the course of the past two semesters at this meeting. The presentation of your project does not meet the expectations of those present.

- a. \_\_\_\_ My knowledge of the area was so specialized that few could appreciate it.
- b. \_\_\_\_ I understood the ideas, but had difficulty explaining their subtleties to people who had never heard them before.
- c. \_\_\_\_ I really don't have enough teaching skill to explain such subtle and complex material adequately.
- d. \_\_\_\_ I knew my topic, but needed a few more days to develop the presentation.
- e. \_\_\_\_ If I had worked harder, I would have done a good job.
- f. \_\_\_\_ (other):

#### Situation #4

You have a close relationship with a person whom you value. Recently you feel that the relationship is no longer as strong as it once was; his/her actions indicate that he/she does not feel as strongly about you as he/she once did.

- a. \_\_\_ He/She is no longer interested in the relationship.
- b. \_\_\_ He/She wants more from me than I can give.
- c. \_\_\_ I am not able to provide that person with what he/she felt he/she needed from the relationship.
- d. \_\_\_ I didn't try hard enough to find the right things to say to enhance our understanding of each other.
- e. \_\_\_ I didn't take the time or put in enough effort to properly understand the other person.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

#### Situation #5

You have been taking a cooking class and this is your first attempt to produce a four course gourmet meal. A group of friends who are experienced cooks have been invited to consume the products of your efforts. The friends do not like the meal.

- a. \_\_\_ My friends were unappreciative of my efforts.
- b. \_\_\_ The food I prepared did not meet the expectations of my friends.
- c. \_\_\_ I couldn't cook well enough to prepare the meal.
- d. \_\_\_ The meal would have been better if I had practiced preparing the dishes ahead of time.
- e. \_\_\_ If I had been more careful preparing the food, the meal would have turned out well.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

### Situation #6

The editor of the newspaper that employs you as a feature writer has assigned you to write an article for the Sunday paper. The article is to be a biographical sketch of a prominent local figure to be submitted in advance of the Wednesday deadline. You do not put the article on the editor's desk until Thursday and it therefore cannot be published as planned.

- a. \_\_\_ There were other projects that were competing for my time.
- b. \_\_\_ There was too much work involved in this project for me to get it finished and meet the deadline.
- c. \_\_\_ I am not sufficiently organized to deal with a variety of tasks at the same time.
- d. \_\_\_ I waited too long to begin the article to complete it within the deadline.
- e. \_\_\_ If I had put in more time I would have completed it without any trouble.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

### Situation #7

A friend and you are playing a game of Scrabble. The game goes on for several hours and the scores remain very close. At the end of the game, however, you have lost.

- a. \_\_\_ Even the best spellers can do nothing when they get low-valued letters when there are openings on the board and high-valued letters when there is no place to put them.
- b. \_\_\_ My ideas were as good as my friend's, but I was always missing one letter to do them.
- c. \_\_\_ My friend was a better player than I was.
- d. \_\_\_ I should have tried to make my moves as strategic as my friend's.
- e. \_\_\_ I wasn't trying hard enough to see all of the potential places for my valuable letters.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

### Situation #8

Your alarm clock is set for 7:00 AM in order that you can wake up in time to complete your homework for your favorite class. The alarm goes off. You turn it off and go back to sleep. As a result you must go to class unprepared.

- a. \_\_\_ The alarm clock was too soft to wake me up completely.
- b. \_\_\_ I vaguely remember hearing the alarm go off but was too tired to wake up.
- c. \_\_\_ I did not have the self-discipline necessary to go to sleep and wake up as my work required.
- d. \_\_\_ Had I gone to bed earlier I would not have been tired in the morning.
- e. \_\_\_ I could have overcome my tiredness if I'd tried harder.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

### Situation #9

You have received a pen as a gift. In addition to its sentimental value, the pen is one of the more comfortable pens you have used. As you sit down to study, you find that you no longer have the pen.

- a. \_\_\_ Pens, by their very nature, are easily lost or stolen.
- b. \_\_\_ I didn't have a secure place to keep my pen.
- c. \_\_\_ It is difficult for me to keep track of my belongings.
- d. \_\_\_ If I had always put my pen away in the same place it would not have been difficult for me to keep track of it.
- e. \_\_\_ If I had tried harder to keep track of the pen, I would not have lost it.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

Situation #10

The requirements for placing your name for nomination to an elected office include obtaining a certain number of signatures on a support petition. You would like to run for the office, and begin to personally collect the required signatures. You do not obtain the required number, and are therefore not eligible for nomination.

- a. \_\_\_ There wasn't enough time to make the contacts.
- b. \_\_\_ Getting ahold of enough people in so short a time is difficult especially when you feel uncomfortable about it.
- c. \_\_\_ Because I don't know how to judge people's responses, I'm not sure of the right strategy to use.
- d. \_\_\_ If I had rehearsed beforehand it would have been easier to collect the names.
- e. \_\_\_ If I had tried to put more of myself into the campaign I would have been effective.
- f. \_\_\_ (other):

## HYPOTHETICAL PROBLEM SITUATIONS

### Part Two

Thank you very much for responding to the hypothetical situations. If you think again about each of the situations, you will see that each one would probably create different feelings in the actor; in some cases the actor might not be affected by the outcome at all, while in others the actor might be very disappointed in himself. What I would like to know now is how each of the situation would have affected your feelings of self-worth had you been the actor. Imagine that your feelings of self-esteem are worth ten points when you are feeling as good about yourself as possible. Look at each situation again and estimate how many points, if any, you would subtract from your self-esteem based on your accounting of the situation and indicate that number below. Assume you had ten points when you entered each of the situations.

- Situation #1 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #2 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #3 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #4 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #5 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #6 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #7 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #8 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #9 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.
- #10 \_\_\_\_\_ points subtracted.

# HYPOTHETICAL PROBLEM SITUATIONS

## Part Three

Thank you again. One of the things I, as a researcher, must be able to determine is why people might respond differently to different hypothetical situations. For example, one of the things I am interested in is whether people's responses are in any way affected by their ability to imagine themselves in the circumstances I have described. Therefore, I would now like you to go back through the ten situations again, one at a time, and circle the number below that indicates the degree to which you could identify with, or imagine yourself in, each of the situations. A response of "1" would indicate that you could very easily place yourself in the situation while "5" indicates that you had great difficulty imagining yourself in that position at all.

Situation #1    (very easily)    1      2      3      4      5    (great difficulty)

Situation #2                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #3                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #4                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #5                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #6                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #7                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #8                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #9                      1      2      3      4      5

Situation #10                    1      2      3      4      5

# ADJECTIVE CHECKLIST

Your responses to this series will allow me to make some estimates about the way you view yourself. Please check the words in this list that you feel best characterize yourself. Do not debate too long over any particular word; you may check as few or as many as seem appropriate.

absent-minded _____	dissatisfied _____	leisurely _____	self-controlled _____
active _____	distractible _____	loud _____	self-denying _____
adaptable _____	dominant _____	loyal _____	self-pitying _____
adventurous _____	egotistical _____	mannerly _____	self-punishing _____
affected _____	emotional _____	mature _____	self-seeking _____
aggressive _____	energetic _____	meek _____	sensitive _____
anxious _____	enterprising _____	methodical _____	serious _____
apathetic _____	enthusiastic _____	mild _____	sharp-witted _____
appreciative _____	excitable _____	mischievous _____	show-off _____
argumentative _____	fearful _____	modest _____	shrewd _____
arrogant _____	fickle _____	nervous _____	shy _____
artistic _____	forceful _____	noisy _____	silent _____
assertive _____	forgetful _____	obliging _____	sociable _____
attractive _____	forgiving _____	obnoxious _____	spineless _____
autocratic _____	formal _____	opinionated _____	spontaneous _____
awkward _____	fussy _____	optimistic _____	stable _____
boastful _____	gentle _____	outgoing _____	strong _____
bossy _____	gloomy _____	outspoken _____	stubborn _____
cautious _____	good-natured _____	patient _____	submissive _____
changeable _____	hard-headed _____	peaceable _____	suggestible _____
cheerful _____	hard-hearted _____	persistent _____	suspicious _____
clear-thinking _____	headstrong _____	pessimistic _____	talkative _____
clever _____	high-strung _____	pleasant _____	thoughtful _____
commonplace _____	humorous _____	pleasure-seeking _____	timid _____
conceited _____	imaginative _____	poised _____	tolerant _____
confident _____	immature _____	praising _____	trusting _____
confused _____	impatient _____	progressive _____	unassuming _____
conscientious _____	impulsive _____	quiet _____	unconventional _____
conservative _____	independent _____	quitting _____	understanding _____
considerate _____	indifferent _____	rational _____	uninhibited _____
contented _____	individualistic _____	rebellious _____	unselfish _____
conventional _____	industrious _____	reflective _____	unstable _____
cooperative _____	ingenious _____	relaxed _____	versatile _____
courageous _____	inhibited _____	reserved _____	warm _____
cowardly _____	initiative _____	resourceful _____	weak _____
curious _____	interests narrow _____	restless _____	wholesome _____
daring _____	interests wide _____	retiring _____	withdrawn _____
despondent _____	jolly _____	rigid _____	witty _____
determined _____	kind _____	self-centered _____	worrying _____
discreet _____	lazy _____	self-confident _____	



## GENERAL BACKGROUND

Finally, I have a few general questions about your background that will be valuable to me in interpreting your responses to the rest of the questionnaire.

1. College \_\_\_\_\_ Conservatory \_\_\_\_\_ Double Degree \_\_\_\_\_
2. Freshman \_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore \_\_\_\_\_ Junior \_\_\_\_\_ Senior \_\_\_\_\_
3. Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_
4. Age \_\_\_\_\_
5. In which of the following types of places have you lived most of your life?
  - a. A city of at least 1 million people. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. A suburb of a city of at least 1 million people. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. A city of less than 1 million people, but more than 500,000. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. A town of 100,000 to 500,000 people. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. A town of less than 100,000 but more than 10,000. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. A town of 10,000 people or less. \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. A rural area. \_\_\_\_\_
6. To what racial or ethnic group do you belong? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many older brothers and sisters do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What is your father's religious preference? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is your mother's religious preference? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What is your religious preference? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What is your father's occupation? (please be as specific as possible)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. What is your mother's occupation? (please be as specific as possible)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Coding Open-Ended Responses to Hypothetical Situations

Two coders used the coding instrument that follows to code the respondents' own attributions in the hypothetical situations. Inspection of the instrument will reveal seven coding categories. The first five coding categories correspond to the attribution continuum described in the paper. Category Six was used to isolate responses that while similar to motivation attributions reduced the saliency of the situation (N = 20 responses). Category Seven, an ability attribution with reduced saliency, was explained to exhaust all possibilities; no actual response fit into this category. Coding was done by consensus. A third coder, also familiar with the instrument, resolved the differences in instances where agreement on coding could not be reached between the two coders.

Training was necessary to bring inter-coder reliability to 94%. The two coders began by familiarizing themselves with the coding instrument and then coding approximately 30 actual responses. When the coders' categorization of these responses was compared to the researcher's coding of the same responses, the inter-coder reliability score was very low, 28%. Additional training was therefore necessary. The categorization of each of these responses was carefully discussed and the coding instrument was modified to contain additional instructions and contingencies. During the next training session 32 other actual responses were categorized with an inter-coder reliability score of 94%. The differences between the coders' and the researcher's coding of these responses were revealed to be a consistent misunderstanding of Category Six. After

further explanation of this code category, the coders proceeded to categorize the remaining responses, including those coded during the first session.

Distribution of Open-Ended Responses:

Category #1	N = 25 responses
Category #2	N = 23 responses
Category #3	N = 22 responses
Category #4	N = 5 responses
Category #5	N = 24 responses
Category #6	N = 20 responses
Category #7	N = 0 responses
Uncodeable	N = 26 responses
<hr/>	
Total	N = 145 responses

## CODING INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITTEN RESPONSES TO HYPOTHETICAL SITUATIONS

The questions you should be asking yourself as you proceed to code the response is how is the person accounting for the failure in the situation? where is the respondent placing the blame for the failure? What does the person think caused the failure? Your answer should fall into one of seven categories:

1. The social or physical environment
2. A combination of the person's ability and the environment
3. The person's ability
4. A combination of the person's ability and his motivation
5. The person's motivation

The next two categories are subsets of the above, mutually exclusive categories, but for analysis purposes, if the person's response meets the criterion of the following categories, code the response into these categories:

6. It was not important to me - I did not care (subset of Category 5)
7. I did not care and probably would not have been able to succeed anyway (subset of Category 4)

Responses "a"-"e" on the questionnaire below each situation correspond directly to Categories 1-5 above and may therefore be used for comparison purposes while you are coding the response.

Definitions of the categories follow:

### CATEGORY #1 - Attribution to the social or physical environment

These kind of responses place the blame on circumstances outside of the person over which he has no control. The circumstances (e.g. other's expectations, physical attributes of the environment such as slippery sidewalks) have placed insurmountable blocks on success in the situation presented. The person feels that if the environmental block was not present, success would have been likely.

examples: A flat tire made me late for the appointment.

The professor did not understand the brilliance of my paper.

### CATEGORY #3 - Attribution to the person's ability

If the person's response fits into this category, the person has said that he did possess the skills necessary to succeed or the person perceives an internal state he could not control (e.g. personal growth, anxiety, nervousness). Even if he had worked harder, or the environment had been favorable, the person did not have the ability required to do better than he did. The statements are usually written in the present tense because the response describes a characteristic of the person that is not easily changed - what was true in that situation is still true now.

examples: I could not save the person from drowning because I do not know how to swim.

I was too nervous to do well.

## Corrections:

Table 1

situation 6  $Tau C = .143$

Table 2

ability attributions mean = 2.4 responses

Table 4

environment tendency  $Tau B = .114$

page 30

line 21  $Tau B = .242$

Table 6

High Self-Confidence

Low Self-Confidence

$Tau C$  NS

$- .156$

$p$

$.032$

page 36

line 23 ( $TC = .204, p = .077$ )

line 24 ( $TC = -.272, p = .023$ )

with appropriate changes in Table 7

#### CATEGORY #5 - Attribution to the person's motivation

An attribution to motivation indicates that the person perceives he had the ability to succeed and that no environmental forces blocked him, but that he did not try hard enough - if he had tried harder success would have been assured. The failure is then something that the person could have done something about by changing his behavior. The person perceives that he made a choice about his behavior. The response is generally written in the past tense.

examples: If I had walked faster, I would have gotten to class on time.

I did not give my plants adequate attention and so they died.

#### CATEGORY #2 - Attribution to the environment and ability

In this case, the person has indicated that an environmental block and a lack of ability were jointly responsible for the failure. The person's performance would have been improved somewhat if the environmental block had not been present, but it would not have been successful because of the perceived lack of ability.

examples: I've never been a good tennis player (ability),  
particularly when the court is lousy (environment).  
The professor was expecting (environment) too much from  
me (ability).

#### CATEGORY #4 - Attribution to ability and motivation

A response that fits into this category places the blame on the person's lack of ability and the fact that he did not try hard enough. If the person had tried harder, he still would not have succeeded, because of his lack of ability, but not to the same degree.

examples: Mechanical things are hard for me (ability) so I should have been more careful (motivation).

If I had studied harder for the exam (motivation), I would have done better (ability - the key word is better instead of well).

#### CATEGORY #6 - Attribution to not caring (subset of Category 5)

This category is identical to an attribution to motivation except that the person has indicated that success was not important. The person has indicated that the reason he failed is because it was not worth the effort to succeed. If it had been important, he would have been able to succeed. If he cared, he would have tried, and succeeded.

examples: I really enjoy smoking and did not want to quit.

Once I started talking to the person, I was no longer interested enough in the person to find mutually interesting subjects.

CATEGORY #7 - Attribution to not caring and ability (subset of Category 4)

A lack of importance to the person and a basic lack of skill are indicated by a response of this type. The person believes that if he had cared more he could have done better, but would not have succeeded completely because he did not have the ability.

example: Even if the race had been important to me (not caring)  
and I had put out more effort, I would probably not  
have won the 100-yard dash.

The coding process should proceed as follows:

1. Read each response carefully, and separately arrive at a determination of what the proper code category should be. Re-check the definitions of the codes given here. Compare the response with the responses provided under the situation.
2. Share your determinations and record the code if your categorizations agree. If your answers do not agree, discuss your varying positions trying to come to a consensus; record that consensus. If no agreement is possible, indicate both code categories on the questionnaire and do not indicate a category on the code sheet.

A response is uncodeable is there is not enough information provided to fit the response into one category versus another. Avoid this code if possible.

Remember, you are not coding the person's future behavior or what he would do next time, only how he has accounted for the failure in this situation at the time.

If the person has taken the time to write the entire response over and leave out a few words, those few words, to the respondent, make the response qualitatively different. Determine whether the attribution category has been altered with the respondent's change.

Do not read into the response more than is necessary to code the response - your projection onto the answer may distort the person's response - try to imagine the response from the respondent's perspective. For example, relationships as entities, separate from the individuals, that has phases and developmental processes in and of itself, beyond individual control would be coded as an environmental attribution.

Try to understand the respondent's use of words - colloquialisms, that can be recognized as colloquialisms, should be interpreted as such and not taken literally.

## Appendix C

### Empirical Division of Variables Used in Analysis

#### INTERNALITY-EXTERNALITY

possible range of scores: zero to 23  
range of scores in sample: zero to 22  
categorization:  
    internal - zero to 12  
    external - 13 to 22

#### SELF-CONFIDENCE

possible range of scores: 1 to 41  
range of scores in sample: 8 to 36  
categorization:  
    high self-confidence - 20 to 36  
    low self-confidence - 8 to 19

#### ENVIRONMENT ATTRIBUTIONS

possible range of scores: zero to 10  
range of scores in sample: zero to 3  
categorization:  
    high choosers - 4 to 8  
    low choosers - zero to 3

#### ABILITY ATTRIBUTIONS

possible range of scores: zero to 10  
range of scores in sample: zero to 6  
categorization:  
    high choosers - 3 to 6  
    low choosers - zero to 2

#### MOTIVATION ATTRIBUTIONS

possible range of scores: zero to 10  
range of scores in sample: zero to 9  
categorization:  
    high choosers - 4 to 9  
    low choosers - zero to 3



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